

Deni Elliott, ed. *The Ethics of Asking: Dilemmas in Higher Education Fund Raising*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 202 pp. \$29.95.

Imagine fundraising without fundraisers. Fire all higher education fundraisers, invest the savings in an advertising campaign that encourages alumni and the general public to make voluntary contributions to the college or university of their choice. This may be the only way higher education fundraising can be conducted in the future, if you take seriously all of the ethical dilemmas in higher education that are presented in *The Ethics of Asking*.

That is the conclusion I reached after analyzing the labyrinth of concerns presented by the book's twelve collaborative authors. These include seven advancement professionals, five professors, and an attorney. One can only assume that their sponsors, The Lilly Endowment and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, approved of their ethical exhortations before the text went to The Johns Hopkins University Press. If so, the reader must ask, "Doesn't such approval constitute a conflict of interest?" Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on the authors' characters, values, intentions, and motives, and whether or not they are presenting us with the truth. Is it possible to write ethically about ethics? Like the ancient philosophers, these writers raise more questions than they answer, making this a great read for the serious minded higher education fundraiser.

Fundraising professionals who are familiar with scandals involving nonprofit organizations such as the case involving former United Way of America President, William Aramony, are keenly aware that the decade of the nineties is the era when the media is focusing its word processors and television cameras on the nonprofit sector. Such scandals violate the public trust between the donor and the tax-exempt recipient.

Eric B. Wentworth's introduction, "The Ethical Landscape," drives the media point home by referencing the Philadelphia *Inquirer's* seven-part series on excessive compensation for nonprofit executives. These high salaries later became the focus of a Congressional subcommittee investigation. Such cases arising from an inquisitive press have nonprofit institutions and their

chief fundraisers looking over their shoulders. Reporters of nonprofit corruption are as anxious for that next big story as Woodward and Bernstein were to break the Watergate coverup in the seventies.

According to Deni Elliot and company, unless fundraising professionals strive for more ethical behavior, they and the institutions they represent risk similar media exposure and loss of their credibility with alumni, corporate, and foundation donors, as well as with the giving public.

Just who are these so-called professional fundraisers at whom the book is aimed? What do they do? More importantly, what should they not do? Throughout *The Ethics of Asking* we are presented with several definitions of higher education fundraisers: "The primary job responsibility for fundraisers is to raise money; fundraisers exist to facilitate gift-giving to the educational institutions that employ them; fundraisers are agents of coordination, who bring together two parties to an exchange, the prospective donor and the institution to which the donation is made. The task of the development officer is to facilitate the relationships between actual or potential donors and the institution; and the development officer's task is to build those relationships (i.e., with people other than fundraising staff), not to insert themselves between the institution and the donor." In each case fundraising professionals are challenged to do what they must and ought do. In other words: obey all laws; do not deceive; do what is appropriate.

The Ethics of Asking views the language of fundraising, as described by Allen Buchanan, as an exchange or interplay between fundraisers and donors. When asking donors to make a contribution to higher education, college and university fundraisers engage in a process that is full of potential ethical land mines that could explode at any time. Some areas of concern are: the handling of prospect research; crossing the line and befriending the donor; giving recognition to a corporate executive in a donor club that is exclusively for individual, not corporate gifts; paying a finder's fee to a financial planner who brings in a charitable remainder-trust donor; compensating fundraisers based upon what they raise; and whether to back-count rather than back-out gifts made prior to the official start of a mega-capital campaign.

"Moral problems in fund raising cannot be treated as isolated, as though their solutions will not have implications for all other moral problems," say Deni Elliott and Bernard Gert in their chapter, "The Moral Context of Fund Raising." They argue that "the moral imperatives of fund raising exist within

a system of morality that extends to all other questions of applied and professional ethics." It is here that the authors make their case. And that leads me to believe that their work is sure to offer more study, research, and writing on this sensitive subject. The public trust is much too important to ignore what many of us have neglected for years, i.e., asking ourselves, "Are we really doing the right thing?"

The book has two main sections—"Social and Moral Foundations" and "Areas of Concern." It also contains a valuable appendix consisting of seven "Statements of Ethics" from professional associations that include the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, the National Society of Fund Raising Executives, and the Council of Foundations. The statement by the American Prospect Research Association is the newest moral code for fundraising professionals. It presents the fundamental principles, procedures, and recommendations for conducting research on prospective or active donors. This is especially important in light of the increased use of firms that provide electronic prospect screening services for development offices. I particularly like the section on confidentiality: "Confidential information pertaining to donors or prospective donors shall be scrupulously protected so that the relationship of trust between donor and donee and the integrity of the prospect research professions be upheld." Too often fundraisers forget this sacred bond.

Sure to cause a stir among the staff and their fundraising consultants is the analysis of "Comprehensive Fund Raising Campaigns" by Richard F. Seaman and Eric B. Wentworth, in which they question how capital campaign gifts are counted. Do you really think \$1 million in alumni dues over a ten-year period should be credited toward the campaign goal? I recall a state university years ago that included these dollars in their \$100 million capital campaign. Such dollars have little relevance to new capital.

Seaman and Wentworth reminded me of what a major donor at the University of Central Florida once said to me, "When you become greedy, you become needy." Many donors today seriously question the needs of institutions as presented to them in fundraising literature. Campaigns with goals of a billion dollars don't have the ring of need. On the other hand, if an institution is seeking a billion dollar goal and announces it has sixty percent in hand, one could interpret this to mean: "I better give now if I want to be a part of a success." It has always been my contention that these mega-goals are not credible since they count every type of gift for every conceivable purpose.

Such mega-goals are no more than marketing gimmicks for getting the press to focus on the campaign. The faculty get quite discouraged when they read that the institution raised a billion dollars, but only funded sixty-five percent of the campaign's stated purposes. "So where is the money?" is a reasonable question. The ethical dilemma lies in the answer.

This book is a must-read for all nonprofit fundraisers, not just those in higher education. It should be placed on the shelf right next to the Bible. Together these books could inspire fear in those who care about the difference between right and wrong. The true value of this one is its academic contribution to the need for more work on the subject of ethics and fundraising. Surely it will be used in any accredited fundraising curriculum, and college and university presidents who hire fundraisers will find the discussion of compensation helpful. It is a timely topic given the rush to retain so-called hired guns. Likewise, trustees of nonprofit boards should be acquainted with the ethical considerations involved in institutional fundraising because theirs is the ultimate responsibility for maintaining an institution's trustworthiness.

The title will probably help sales, but I find it misleading. There are only a few references to or examples of fundraisers making the actual ask. Most professionals know that less than ten percent of a major gift solicitation involves asking. The other ninety percent is doing your homework, getting to know the prospect, cultivating his or her interest, and involving the prospect in the institution. Like marriage, fundraising first involves a courtship before making the big request. It is a stretch to suggest that the ethical dilemma is in the asking. A more appropriate title would be, "The Courtship of Donors: Ethical Considerations in Higher Education Fund Raising."